

Journeys through EXPAND

**Providing Affordable Fitness, Leisure and Cultural Arts Programs for
Adults with Mild Traumatic Brain Injury and other similar
Neurological Conditions.**



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New Hooping Program—by Cory Lasher, CTRS

Journeys started its first Hula Hooping class on February 8 with eight participants in attendance, and it was a HIT! We laughed.....we laughed some more..... and then we all realized aaahhh haaa, we can do this! I first learned about the “hooping world” from my past Intern, Casey Solana, who lived and breathed hooping. It was fun to watch Casey as she spun her hoop effortlessly around her body and through her internship with EXPAND she provided a class to adults with developmental disabilities. It was Casey who made me believe that anyone can hoop and it was true! Of course my first experience with a hula hoop was when I was a child and I never really was good at it. However, with these specialized weighted hoops, I learned that pretty much anyone can do it.

This past fall, I discovered Brooke Null, a hooping instructor who has taught a few classes for the Parks and Recreation department. I heard wonderful things about Brooke, so I picked up the phone and gave her a call. I asked Brooke if she would be interested in teaching a hooping class to adults who have a brain injury and she jumped to the opportunity.

Brooke is originally from the Appalachian Mountains of West Virginia and now lives in Boulder. She has been living in the great state of Colorado for five years. Her hoop journey started in 2011. After seeing another hula hooper she was very intrigued and decided to take a class for herself. She picked up a hoop and fell in love. She was far from being a natural at hula hooping but was so captivated she started her own practice. She has now been teaching for over 2 years and loves sharing such a unique and fun way to stay fit and active.

Brooke's mission is to show people that we are allowed to have fun, smile, and laugh while staying active mentally and physically! Brooke states “Hooping is an incredibly rewarding experience. You will burn calories, increase hand-eye coordination and create new pathways in the brain”. All we do is laugh in this class. We have discovered our inner child. We hope you decide to join us. Please see enclosed flyer for the next Journeys hooping class.



Participant Highlight—by Melinda Markser (EXPAND Intern)

In 1988 at the age of 26, Sherry Olson was in Australia on a speaking engagement in the place of a fellow scientist at NCAR (National Center for Atmospheric Research) where she was finishing up some experiments to include in her Ph.D. thesis through Colorado University. She was involved in an auto accident with a logging truck. In Australia they don't drive on the right side of the road. Luckily Sherry doesn't remember the accident.

As a result of the accident, Sherry sustained a severe Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) and was in a coma for three weeks. She remained in a hospital in Australia for two more weeks before being transferred back to the United States on an Army Medevac Plane. She then spent time at the Swedish Medical Hospital in Englewood, before transferring to Craig Hospital. In all, Sherry spent nine months in hospitals where she had to relearn how to talk and how to walk. Sherry is convinced that the outcome of her brain injury was much less severe because of a procedure done in Australia where a hole is drilled into the skull to monitor intracranial pressure.

After returning to Boulder in 1989, Sherry did outpatient Recreation Therapy at Mapleton Center at Boulder Community Hospital with Diane LaTourrette. With Diane's help, she was able to relearn to ride a bike, which is still Sherry's main form of transportation in the city. Diane also helped her with both hiking and kayaking and introduced Sherry to Journeys through EXPAND. Sherry speaks very highly of Journeys through EXPAND, especially the Stained Glass program, saying that it fills up her time with things that are enjoyable and that it gives her something to look forward to. Smith (2007) suggests that a club-like, social atmosphere where participants feel comfortable to talk informally about matters not associated with their traumas or their healing processes can be therapeutic. This type of setting can provide encouragement to move on with life and carry on. While Sherry says that the Stained Glass program gives her something to live for and a purpose, research suggests that individuals with brain injuries are participating in cognitive rehabilitation because, “while being creative, they are unconsciously (re)acquiring knowledge about how to plan, sequence, and then complete projects” (Smith, p. 5, 2007). Sherry also expresses that the people she’s met at the programs are some of her better friends because she feels there is a common understanding. A creative environment facilitates interaction between participants as they work on their projects (Smith, 2007). The benefits of social interaction include increased self-esteem, increased interpersonal confidence, and increased social skills. Through conversation with others who have similar experiences, participants “begin to interpret their visions of the lives they lead now and expand their perceptions of how their lives should now be” (Smith, p. 302, 2007). Smith (2007) states that “creative activities are intra-personally beneficial because they can be used as another form of expression as individuals become aware of their feelings. The creative process can be a vehicle to use to unlock feelings and thoughts” (p. 303). Creative activities also increased feelings of accomplishment and increased sense of re-engagement with life.

Cont: Participant Highlight

Sherry says that her brain injury has completely changed her life, including some aspects of her personality. For example, her attitude towards marriage and having children changed. She met her husband in 1984 at the University of Colorado while they were both grad students. Sherry was never planning to get married or to have children, but after the accident in 1991, she married John and had a daughter 1994. Despite the limitations of the brain injury, Sherry barely had a setback; she got her Ph.D. in 1992, just four years after her accident! Sherry wrote her thesis about an aspect of Atmospheric Chemistry.

The hardest thing that Sherry has had to overcome from her brain injury is acceptance of her abilities. She is disgruntled that she cannot do some of the kayaking manoeuvres she was once able to do. But she is happy that she can still kayak.

The advice that Sherry would give to someone who has just acquired a brain injury is that acceptance is the key to harmony. If you can't accept this new life, then you're going to be miserable trying to fight to get your old life back. If you can accept your new life, then you can focus on improvements and what abilities you still have. It's vital to focus on the positives. Sherry was amazed at all the people around her trying to help. She appreciatively says that she might have lost a lot, but look at what she still has; she's still alive. She wants to pass along an extremely valuable tool she has found to help her with her memory challenges: A Memory Notebook. Sherry uses an 8 ½" x 11" spiral notebook where she puts all the important contacts, her schedule, her appointments and meetings, and things to do. This way if she needs to refer back to a name or place from weeks or months past, it is usually right there.

Smith, C. (2007). Innovative Rehabilitation After Head Injury: Examining the Use of a Creative Intervention. *Journal Of Social Work Practice*, 21(3), 297-309.



If you would like to set up a time to meet with Cory Lasher, Program Coordinator to discuss the different ways you can get involved with Boulder Parks and Recreation, email her at: lasherc@bouldercolorado.gov or call 303-413-7269.